

correct road, was located in what looked like a former coal office, with the MW tx on the hillside behind the building. A pleasant half hour was spent chatting to the night-time DJ and admiring the studio, which considering the size of the station was very well designed. The MW tx was on about 801kHz, and we were able to hear the second harmonic throughout the town, although it faded out within a mile. Stopped off at the local burger bar for tea then back to the B&B for a night recording and recuperation ready for the next day

Next Issue: The West Coast! A new station, more aimless wanderings, and a new song for the trip.

Adrian Cooke Laser MastersTape

Not another Laser jingle cassette I hear you cry, but wait a minute this one is certainly different. On it you can hear all those Laser blasts together with a full selection of commercials, Promos and Jingles taken straight from the master tapes themselves on board the m.v. Communicator, and whats more this collection has to be the most extensive produced on any contemporary Offshore Radio station, added to the actual jingles are the voices of many of the jocks before they began recording!

Definitely one for any Jingle collector, if you remember it from Laser there's a 98% chance that you will find it here. A reward as well for anyone disappointed by the material previously released.

Weekly Report, which is always first with the News in Print has made it even quicker recently following their move of publication dates from Sunday to Saturday. The report has found its way through letterboxes on the opposite side of the country first thing on Saturday morning!

Dave Lee Travis appears to have pulled a fast one on us all. Dave who apparently was to have left the BBC for talking to much has found himself with an extra show. On Saturdays, as well as Sunday mornings. The questions which instantly follow are; 1 - Has Dave doubled the amount of talking he does, or is it now spread over two days, 2 - Why the sudden change of heart?

WFRL had a bit of bother with the weather during their October transmission, with a mini hurricane just around the corner from their broadcasting site.

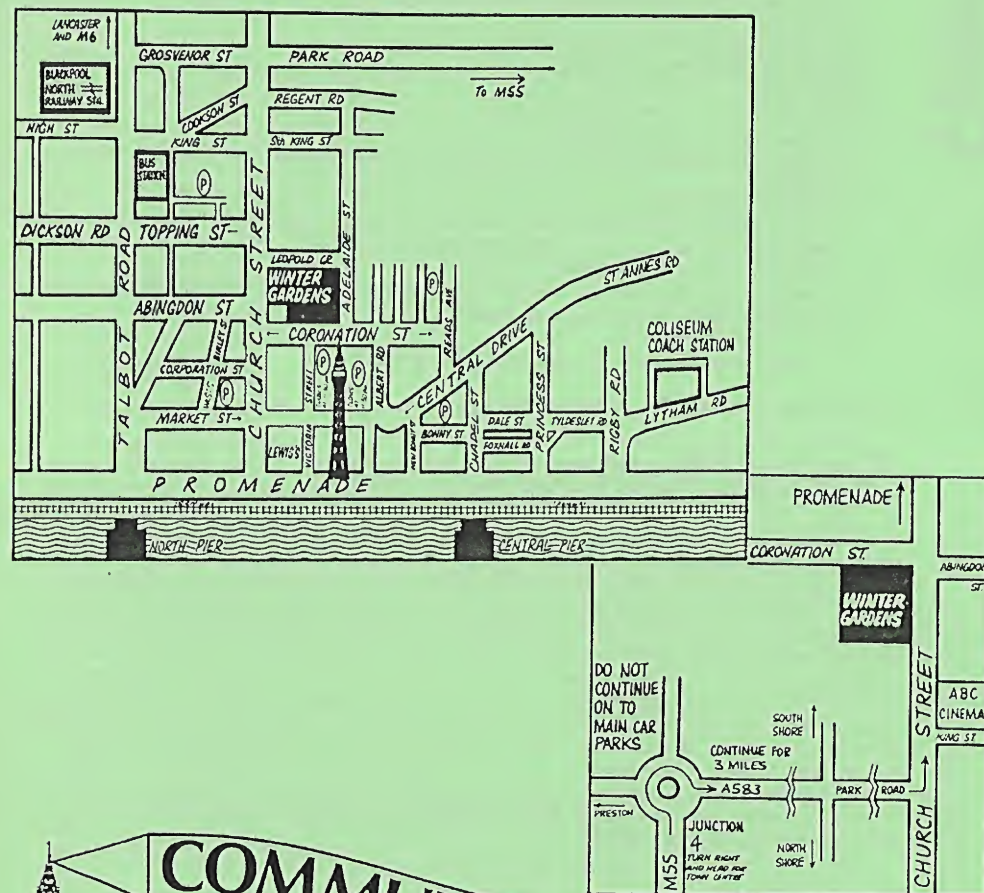
Wavelength was determined not to let the Postal Strike get in the way of anything. Several surprised readers found Adrian Cooke personally turning up of their doorsteps with a copy of Wavelength.

Chris Cary, formally Spangles Muldoon on Radio Caroline, and now boss of the Satellite delivered Radio Nova sharply denied that he had anything to do with the launch of any Radio stations from the Principality of Sealand, when he spoke to our correspondent recently.

"I havn't been involved with Pirate Radio since I was a wee lad" he said.

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1988

No.24



COMMUNICATE 88

Offshore Echo's
ANORAKS UK

RD BOX 839
BLACKPOOL FY1 4RE
Tel. (0253) 882017

Po Box 5, Hunstanton, Norfolk, PE36 5AU.

Wavelength

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The Sideways look at the World of radio.

Front Illustration: The road to Blackpool.

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Adrian Cooke, Editor.

PRICES:

Single Issue; United Kingdom 65p.

Europe, including Ireland and the rest of the World 3 International Reply Coupons.

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Deadline for Wavelength 25 is January 7th, 1989.

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Saturday September 2nd, 1988

After some severe problems during the day which left Radio 558 off the air from mid morning, and just a carrier on Shortwave some staff changes were made, with Rob Harrison and Judy Murphy returning to the ship, they were joined by Paul Shelton, who was previously on board under the name of Paul Pornon.

Sunday again saw difficulties with the station going off the air at Breakfast shortly after Johann Maasbach's programme at 0800. This left an unmodulated carrier on 558, whilst at 0900 on 6215 the programmes of Radio 558 appeared. - The ship had been left without a transmitter engine, and when problems developed with the programme feed from the studio to the transmitters, nothing could be done to rectify it. Luckily a stand by engineer was quickly found and taken out to the ship.

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Steve and Rob swapped shows the next week, and back again at the start of the week after. Perhaps it was all the excitement in having the heating fixed.

News bulletins were missing from both Radio 558 and Radio Caroline, and did not return until October 18th. The festival and leisure guide continued to be read out between 1900 and 2000.

The News returned on October 18th, along with Steve Conway reading it. The full line up Steve Masters, Steve Conway, Chris Kennedy and Andy Bradgate. It was Chris' birthday on October 19th, so he was let off programming. The station closed at midnight on this evening and for the remainder of the week, however the lost hours were more than worthwhile when on Saturday morning test tones were noted on 819 at around 1000. Later in the day this switched to a relay of Radio 558. At 1800 separate programmes were aired with the return of Viewpoint, and finally at 2230 a relay of Caroline 558 was made. During the midnight news Steve Conway announced that Radio Caroline would officially return to 24 hour programming on Sunday November 6th, at 1200 during the run up to this the Dutch programmes would gradually move to 819. Indeed the following week whilst 558 closed Dutch programming at 1800 (UK time) 819 continued for a further hour before handing over to Viewpoint, although this arrangement ceased the following week. Viewpoint has seen the return of many of the religious broadcasters who previously used the facilities including Roy Masters and Ernest O'Neill. Radio 558 carried regular promotions both for their own name change and for Radio Caroline's return to 24 hour programming.

At 1200 CET (1100 UK Time) 819 came alive with separated programming, after the regular 'Hi Tech Heroes' theme the first show was the regular Smacking Top Three.

Meanwhile 558 announced that Radio Caroline would recommence 24 hour programming at 1200 that afternoon (A day earlier than previously announced) Dutch listeners were also informed of the new Radio 819.

Steve Masters was first on the air, followed at 1400 by Steve Conway, Chris Kennedy at 1600 and Andy Bradgate at 2000, although Andy did not complete his show and Steve Conway stood in.

Andy Bradgate presented the first News Bulletin at 1300, which had a new theme. It was announced the weekend bulletins would be at 0900, 1300, 1800 and 2400. On Weekdays bulletins would be hourly during the Drive and Breakfast programmes, with additional bulletins at 1300, 2100 and 2400.

World Mission Radio continue to broadcast from the Ross Revenge, although the station has spent some days off the air. Of particular note is the Sunday Morning WMR goes 1x which is presented by Tom de Wit between 1000 and 1100. This programme was first noted on September 18th when it featured a report of Italian Radio and Television, a report on an American station, and new Radio stations in Finland. In addition listeners reception reports have been read out and News on licenced and unlicensed stations was requested.

M.V. ERETS HATSUI

A new ship joined the MV Peace in the Mediterranean, the MV Erets Hatsui, meaning land of the Gazelle has been running test transmissions from their 10kw transmitter on 918kHz. Programming consists of Hebrew Music, with information and commercials for the West Bank. Programmes were expected to commence on November 4th.

SEALAND

The ex-North Sea fort, which declared independence in the late 1960s is back in the news again. For some time owner Roy Bates has expressed a wish to operate a Radio station from Sealand, and has said he will licence up to three such channels. It now looks as if something could actually be happening. This follows engineer Michael Barrington having to be airlifted to hospital from the fort after being seriously injured whilst working on the fort, apparently on a welding job. There will apparently be three transmitters from the Principality of Sealand, two on AM and one on FM. The finger of suspicion has been pointed in particular at Radio Nova, currently relayed around Europe from their transmitter on Intelsat, and taken by some ILR stations in the United Kingdom, and Independent stations in Ireland. However, Nova's Chris Cary has said that he would rather scramble his signal than have it relayed by pirates. Denying that he has any involvement with Sealand. It has also been suggested that the new Astra Satellite might become involved when it goes into service next February.

The British Authorities do not agree with Bates' self proclaimed Sovereignty.

M.V. SARAH

In the United States, RADIO NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL returned to the air on October 16th starting with an open carrier on 1620kHz, the time was 0050 GMT, at 0100 a full identification was given and the station was back on the air. Although the ship is capable of making broadcasts on FM, Short Wave, and Long Wave only the medium wave transmitter was activated. The flag of convenience flown by the Sarah was unusual to say the least - That of the principality of Sealand, this is added to information from project manager Alan Weiner that he no longer owns the vessel, and that it is now owned by British interests.

On Monday October 17th US District Judge John J. McNaught in Boston issued a temporary restraining order, and at 10pm local time US officials went alongside the Sarah and tried to serve the notice on them, however the crew refused to allow the officials on board so the notice was read out over a loud hailer. With the message read the on air jock then announced that the station was leaving the air due to technical difficulties.

GREAT BRITAIN

RADIO CAVENDISH (1) made a rare broadcast on August 28th with DJs Phil Collins, and Mike Williams, who spent some time with Radio Caroline earlier in the year. Cavendish have promised a return to a regular schedule, but are so far keeping to these occasional, yet welcome broadcasts.

RTR (2) the station run by another Caroline DJ - Steve Masters continues to make regular broadcasts although these are obviously restricted to when Steve is on land. Various other Caroline DJs also make appearances on the station.

RADIO EAST COAST COMMERCIAL, on 6815 continue to make almost weekly broadcasts with a selection of music, different to that normally heard on the Short Wave, away from Top 40 Norman Nelson prefers to include discs, which are at least four years old and goes back to Rock and Roll, and on October 23rd reissues tracks. The Free Radio programme continues every 1st Sunday with occasional items read out during the other broadcasts. Comments continue to be made regarding relay stations, in particular WLR and this has provoked comment around the Free Radio World. On October 2nd it was announced that transmissions on 6310 were being dropped, as RECC had found that they were being sandwiched by stations on either side, including one of the Scottish Free Radio Network transmitters on 6317. The October 9th broadcast contained comments on IBA proposals that they should licence another 20 local stations around the United Kingdom. (3)

WONDERFUL FREE RADIO LONDON (3) successfully completed their recent high frequency transmissions, and will be on the air on the same frequencies, and with the same schedule from November 5th, this includes the regular 1st Sunday transmission on the 41mb (7385) reports have already come in from across the United Kingdom, and more are expected from further afield. Second Sunday transmissions also continue on 6300 featuring the Tender Trip programme at 1100. Andy Walker has said that his 6300 programme will put more emphasis on Oldies, with Classic Rock and Album tracks being aired on 41 metres.

BRITAIN RADIO INTERNATIONAL (4 + 5) continue their 2nd and 4th Sunday schedules although various problems meant a reduced schedule for October 23rd. Jayne has lost her programme twice over recent weeks. Whilst Oldies are played on the 2nd Sunday broadcast a more general format is heard on the 4th Sunday and this includes the Free Radio Programme at 1200.

RADIO APOLLO (3) were heard on air October 2nd, with a broadcast that included interviews taken during the recent Communicate '88 convention.

IRELAND

WLR (6) have now purchased the 6230 transmitter previously owned by Radio Rainbow - the question now, is the station still counted as being a relay, certainly the transmitter is still located in the same area of Ireland. The station still remains the strongest on the 48 metre band and features a regular 'phone line for reception reports. The address is now c/o Kenny King, the operator of Oldies station Crusin' Solid Gold. John commented that Kenny King always complained that he hardly ever gets any interesting mail. The United Kingdom Postal strike during September caused considerable delays in delivering the programme tapes to the transmission site, the result was that Radio Fax could be found on the 6230 outlet, with separate programming to that of the regular 6205 outlet. Crusin' Solid Gold were also affected by the lack of movement in the Royal Mail. A repeat of an earlier programme was broadcast on September 18th. With an album track format Big 'K' Radio were noted via the WLR transmitter on October 16th in what was announced as their third broadcast, the first being on June 12th of this year. (8)

EUROPE

FRS Holland were taken off the air during their broadcast on October 16th. It was an open secret that the station's programmes had been relayed in recent months by Radio New Wave. So it was at 1110 Radio New Wave were raided by the Dutch RCD. Only the 225 Watt transmitter, and a separate modulator were confiscated, leaving studio equipment, the aerial, and notably the programme tapes. The RCD said during the raid that they had been too much activity by Short Wave operators in the Netherlands and gave the impression that more raids may follow. FRS Holland is uncertain as to whether they will have a new relay lined up in time for their next broadcast due on the third Sunday in November (7) (Frs Goes Dx)

FM	88	92	96	100	104	108	MHz		
SW	6.0	6.5	8.0	10.0	13.0	18.0	MHz		
MW	54	60	70	80	100	120	140	160	kHz
LW	150	170	190	220	250	270	285	kHz	

ADDRESS BOOK

1. 128 Kingfisher Drive, Eastbourne, Sussex.
2. Po Box 140, Ashford, Kent.
3. Po Box 5, Hunstanton, Norfolk. PE36 5AU.
4. 32 Victoria Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP1 3NG.
5. Postbus 19074, 3501 DB, Utrecht, The Netherlands.
6. 100 Watson Crescent, Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.
7. Postbus 41, 7700 AA Dedemsvaart, The Netherlands
8. 4 Blandford Road, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 2KN.

LISTENER'S GUIDE

TABLE OF REGULAR FREE RADIO BROADCASTERS

6205	Radio Fax	IRL	Daily
6215	World Mission Radio / Radio Caroline International Waters		Daily
6225	FRS Holland	NL	3rd Sunday
6230	WLR(including relays)	IRL	Every Sunday
6280	Westside Radio (including Relays)	IRL	Every Sunday
6290	Radio Orion	GB	2nd Sunday
6295	Radio Krystel	GB	4th Sunday
6300	Radio Orion	GB	Most Sundays
	WFRL: Wonderful Free Radio London	GB	2nd Sunday
6304	BRI: Britain Radio International	GB	2nd and 4th Sundays
6318	Scottish Free Radio Network	IRL	Every Sunday
6815	Radio East Coast Commercial	GB	Every Sunday
7385	WFRL: Wonderful Free Radio London	GB	1st Sunday
Other regular stations with no fixed schedule			
6257	MTR	GB	
6285	Radio Apollo	GB	

WFRL WORLDWIDE

Worldwatch: Andy Walker and Dave the Rave, Dx Section: Roger Ross, UK Top Twenty Album Show: Adrian Cooke, Rock Show: Tony Wolfe.

First Saturday: 9970kHz 31 metres 0000-2400 UTC

Following Wednesday: 12108kHz 25 metres 0000-2400 UTC

Following Saturday: 11170kHz, 25 metres 0000-2400 UTC

Schedule subject to last minute revision.

MIDLANDS

John Hickling

When I was last at home in North Derbyshire near the end of September HCR from Nottingham and ABC-FM from Leeds could both be heard. H.C.R. was quite strong and passable in Stereo, ABC-FM was heard quite weakly in Mono only. The frequency was announced as 105.1 for ABC. Also heard was Rapid FM 98.1 from Leeds, but with a weak signal and much bleedover from Radio One FM.

Anthony Page.

BIRMINGHAM

PCRL, Powerhouse FM and Enterprise FM are all operative here most of the time and Fresh-FM 95 are heard most weekends. KISS-FM were heard briefly during late September, although I understand that they have since been raided. (hardly surprising since they had a very wide bandwidth). A new station opened on October 9th (Sunday) on an announced frequency of 102.5 (more like 102.3 as it does not interfere with any ILR stations)- STARLIGHT-FM. The signal is excellent, in mono only, and they have been heard every day up to October 13th. The station is normally on air by 1800. The possibility of a raid should not be discounted as they were dangerously close to a police frequency.

A couple of Sundays ago, a station was heard on 105.8 MHz announcing engineering test transmissions for a new Community station for the West Midlands. A comment was made about the station being for people who like rock and don't like disco, and the format was Adult Orientated Rock(AOR) The address was the same as that of Radio Orion. The signal was excellent, in mono only. At one point Radio 558 was relayed.

Starlight-FM are from the Sandwell area, and are probably run by ex-Electro 107 DJs. PCRL were having problems during the early evening on October 14th as a dead carrier only was heard, and this kept cutting out. They returned later but the audio was hissy.

NOTTINGHAM

Heatwave (105), despite the many DTI raids and pending court appearances for several of the crew, continues to give out a powerful Stereo signal which virtually obliterates any other free station around 105; usually making HEATWAVE the only station heard above 104 Mhz. "The Spirit" was heard at 2230 on 17/08/88 spinning some soft/mellow soul music. Besides Reggae and soul there is a wide variety of music featured including hip-hop, mowtown gospel and even Jim Reeves!! On September 1st at 1100 a new DJ by the name "Private Benjamin" was introduced by DJ "Lioness" (Reggae music)

IRISH STATIONS RECEIVED LOCALLY

Radio Dublin (1188 kHz) is regularly logged with distorted audio - the station can be picked up on the dial but is totally unlistenable (Pop Music)

Mallaeni 88 FM (?) was heard on 1278 kHz at 1130 on 24/08/88 with a fairly good SINFO of 34443 (Pop Music)

Sunshine 101 is the strongest of all Independent Irish stations, as received in Nottingham. Both its medium wave frequencies 531 and 846 are listenable, however 531 kHz has the advantage of being in an empty region of the band, especially when compared to 846 which often gets interference from BBC Radio Leicester's 837 kHz transmitter (Pop Music)

Super Q 102; currently, this is the second best received independent station from Ireland with the 738 kHz giving a SINFO rating of 33343/4 during Daytime. It's 819 frequency isn't as clear (Pop Music)

Big'M' Community Radio (864 kHz) from County Monaghan features a lot of "Country and Western" style music and can be heard daily with a varying signal - SINFO around 2/33342/3. Often BBC Radio Norfolk on 873 interrupts the signal.

From the North Boyneside Radio 244 (1233 Khz) is heard daily with a SINFO rarely ever better than a 2/33343 rating. Domestic electrical interference at the receiving and regularly limits the audibility of the station. The best method I have for receiving the station is to use an exterior 75ft long horizontal copper wire antenna with a loop frame antenna to aid the audio clarity

NORTH SEA

Radio Caroline's/Radio 558's daytime signals are consistently well received with a SINFO rating of 44544. However, it is often quiet difficult to totally eliminate interference from RTE Radio 1 on an adjacent frequency and the late-night transmissions are always swamped-out by European station skip (Pop/Rock music)

LONDON

Andy Walker

Hello Pop Pickers, It's Andy Time again, and what a lot of rumours we've been hearing about over the past few weeks, but as I don't write about rumours, only facts we'll get on with it. SRE (Swinging Radio England) 1611 kHz, the station that put Free Radio back on the map here in London, has lost the lot in a DTI raid, over £1800 worth of equipment which included the link tx and a £600 multiple cassette player which carried the station's programmes. When I spoke to the head man at SRE on the Communicate 88 express, heading for Blackpool he told me had only £19.85 in the bank, and that a raid would be a major setback for the station. I don't think that they ever thought of the link being lost. I told him at the time that just one link was not good enough and I hate being proved right. I wish the guys on SRE all the best, and a quick return to the airwaves. As I wrote in the last issue, TKO have closed down, but then underwent a name change, they are now known as Atlantic Radio, this is believed to be a tactic to stop raids as TKO was very popular. London's upmarket listeners station CD-93 still have a good signal over most of the capital - but is the Bob Matthews on CD -93 the same one who was on Caroline, a few years back. He's also an ex-Jackie DJ. I wonder? A while back I had a chat with Kiss-FM's transmitter engineer, who was telling me about troubles with unofficial raids on the station. It was believed that a Radio Ham and partner were removing the station's txs almost every weekend from their Camden tower block site in North London. Kiss then returned to pirate Alley at Crystal Palace, where the transmitter would be safe(ish) behind locked doors. I was also told that if anyone did go to the site, three large gentlemen with iron bars and baseball bats would warn people off, and that included the DTI!

How about some Hot Gossip! Well, an unnamed gentleman who builds transmitters for the asian, Greek, etc stations, makes extra cash by removing the txs from the stations sites after he has sold them. He re-boxes, then re-sells them to the stations as new. This is done everytime his cashflow gets low. I shall say no more! Oldies station Hits FM were rumoured to be moving on to AM, due to threats from other stations operating around their channel of 98.2, they now seem to be staying put on FM with a time-share with the relaunching of Raiders Pop station, well that's what it used to be called, maybe they've grown up and dropped the pop station bit!

I had to laugh while listening to LWR, they are claiming to be broadcasting from West London, well the studio maybe in the west of the city but the main tx is only three minutes drive from my flat. Talking of which

I got a photo of a raid on the station last month. I saw someone climbing the ladder to the roof of the tower block, drove onto the estate, and with the police looking down on me, Snap ! Gotya! I made a very quick exit from that estate, and the photograph? Well it didn't come out too bad. That's it for now, I'm off to Thailand to Bangkok for a holiday, and don't worry I'm taking my mates with me, Bye!

NORTH WEST

RADIO MERSEY WAVES are still operating regularly on 1242, but now broadcasting daily although times vary. The address is 126 Curlew Way, Moreton, Wirrel, Merseyside. L46 7SS.

RADIO ATLANTIS - Still using 1197 and operating mainly Friday to Monday. The station is still solely operated by Rick Dane. He can be contacted at 1 Yew Tree Lane, West Derby, Liverpool L12 9HG.

NORTH COAST RADIO: This station operates Friday to Monday on 104.85 and can be contacted at 79 Kestrel Road, Wirrel, Merseyside L46 6BW.

RADIO YERONICA operate Sundays only on 104.75, although in recent weeks an additional frequency of 98.2 has been tested. DJs include Adrian Cooke, Dean Bartlett and Neil Frazer. The format is AOR. 81 Lark Lane, Liverpool, L17 8UP is the address.

STORETON COMMUNITY RADIO ; have been experiencing a few problems recently and have only been using low power. The station operates Saturday/Sunday on 1026 and can be contacted at 52 Clee Hill Road, Birkenhead, Merseyside, L42 8PA.

An UNIDENTIFIED signal has been heard transmitting purely a blank carrier on 102 FM, the source remains a mystery.

WEST YORKSHIRE

Four stations are now operating regularly from the City of Leeds. They are MUSIC CITY RADIO on 90.3 , RAPID FM on 98.1 , PEOPLES' FM on 104.75 and ABC-FM On 105.15 Nearby in Bradford PCR operates daily on 104.9

MANCHESTER

Two stations on the air regularly at the moment; namely WBLS on 104.4 and LASER 103.5

COUNTRYWIDE

PORTSMOUTH

Swinging Radio England has now spread to Portsmouth, the Countrywide network now boasts SRE Portsmouth and broadcasts on 104 FM with the following schedule every weekend:

Saturday

0730 Jonathan Rogers
0900 Sounds of the 60s: Simon Dee, as Radio Two
1000 The General
1130 Andy Tee
1230 Guest DJ.

Sunday

0730 Richard Graham
0900 Fab 40 chart with Dirty Don
1000 Top Cat
1130 Paul Saunders
1230 Dave Rave

Contact address for the Portsmouth section is 10 Bromyard Crescent, Paulsgrove Portsmouth PO6 3SP. The station is currently on the lookout for DJs.

Mike Ross

So here we are almost at the end of the eighties, and how has Free Radio progressed in the past eight years ? I think that if anyone had told me that I'd be able to listen to dozens of 24 hour Radio stations I'd probably have taken it with a pinch of salt: the DTI wouldn't take too long to close them down, besides which where would they operate from ? Tower blocks were already starting to become a problem as caretakers learned to recognise signs of station occupation, and to run a station from a house for any length of time was asking for trouble.

The solution to these problems was easy: Money. There's a lot of money to be made in radio if you play your cards right; and certain people were quick to spot the potential. The first signs of this were in the rivalry between Soul station Invicta and their Jazz-Funk rivals JFM who both considered the other to be taking some of their listeners, ads, etc. The frequency meetings, where stations got together to work out times, frequencies and sites sometimes degenerated into slanging matches between the two, within a couple of years more 'Black Music' stations in the shape of Horizon, Solar, DBC etc appeared and Invicta finally closed down. Then came Radio Jackie's use of the legal loophole which enabled them to start 24 hour broadcasting and the number of stations rocketed. Many of these were started simply to make money by cashing in on the night club scene (where DJs would publicise their own gigs or run adverts for local clubs), the record industry which despite their dislike of pirate stations was not above spending hundreds of pounds just to get a record made "Hit of the Week" of these same stations- and the lucrative small business advertising, where local businesses advertised on the stations where it was cheaper and more local than the 'local' IBA stations.

The money meant that new equipment could be provided immediately the DTI had raided, fines could be paid and more powerful transmitters could be bought. It also meant that operators were willing to take further measures to protect their investment or to get it started: I have recently heard of at least one station who has been threatened and another who was apparently robbed at knifepoint of large amounts of equipment.

During the eighties, the whole aspect of Free Radio has changed as the hobby operators are forced out by the commercial interests and the whole thing becomes just a parody of the existing system. Even Short Wave - once occupied by 'radio orientated' stations such as EMR, Zodiac, Zenith etc, has become more musical and commercial, with stations paying to have their programmes relayed from the safe haven of Ireland. I wonder what will happen with the proposed Broadcasting Bill, whenever it gets off the ground, which is supposed to bring in the new community stations, and at the same time deprive the existing stations of their money by making it illegal to advertise on Unlicensed Radio. This might have the effect of giving the people the radio they want and leave Free Radio to the dedicated Anorak I say 'might' because there is always the possibility that the new radio will just turn out to be a twin of the existing, or that commercial pressure will reduce it to a load of network radio clones. Who knows?

I must add that these are my own views. Others will likely see things differently. Do you consider that this is no longer 'Free Radio' but more 'Pirate Radio' Comments to Wavelength please.



It took Monitor, Offshore Echo's, and Anoraks UK, to organise the North West's first Free Radio convention, held in the Spanish Rooms of the Winter Gardens in Blackpool. I travelled up on the Caroline Movement's Communicate '88 Express, and I must say getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning, then driving to pick-up fellow WFRL DJ Dave the Rave, then on to a pick up point at Purfleet in Essex to wait for the coach, which was late is not one of life's greatest experiences.

We reached Blackpool at 1 o'clock, and headed for the bar, not before we had put on the huge badges which cost £10. The hall itself was very plush, with what looked like Spanish architecture moulded from fibreglass around the roof of the hall. We helped the Caroline Movement carry their sales stand to its pitch, then back to the bar. On stage was Al Weiner from Radio New York International talking about the station (what else). When Al finished his chat we were treated to muffled recordings of Radio Caroline North, maybe they sounded better on a good Hi-fi, and that Dave Simpson's Caroline Roadshow made them muffled, who knows? After a while on stage came Steve Conway, Judy Murphy and Ian Mack from Radio Caroline talking about the past, present and future of the station. They were joined by Radio 558 Dutch jock, Colin Pieters. After what seemed like a lifetime they left the stage. Then it was more muffled recordings of Caroline North. The next guest was Pete Siemster talking about Satellite Radio, and Paul Graham who spoke about his days on Radio Caroline and time in Ireland. Then Roger Matthews spoke about Ludlow's Sunshine Radio, and guess what happened next? Yes, more muffled Caroline North recordings. While I was looking over the Anoraks UK sales stand, I overheard Barrie talking to a chap, who was unknown to me, asking him to go on and talk about "The Past". The chap replied "I don't know what to say". Barrie's reply.

"Just talk about anything". At this time I knew they were desperate. The rest of the day was taken up by two of the SRE team, John Catlett spoke about Radio Tara and Laser, John Dwyer, Ian Akers, Stuart Clarke, Peter Tait and Carl Kingston spoke about what we have all heard before, their past with Radio Caroline, and the evening finished with Oldies being played by the Caroline Roadshow. The finale was a let down, nothing like last years Star studied cast at Driftback 20. While the staff cleared up I spoke to Monitor's Penelope Page, who told me that Don Allen was the first to be asked to attend the event, and Tony Allen said that he wouldn't miss it for the world. Both failed to turn up. The event failed to attract the big names which turn up to the CM events, maybe the three so called leaders do not carry the weight and respect which the CM seem to do. This is only my view of the day, the highlight of which was seeing the famous Blackpool lights. The journey home was long and boring, not even a radio on the coach. I climbed into bed at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning, wishing I had stayed at home, and next time there's an event north of Watford, I will.

Dateline: Saturday September 24th. Off at the ungodly hour of 3.30 am for Blackpool, stopping off en route to pick up a couple of other insomniacs then up the Motorway listening to old Caroline tapes as far as Birmingham, where we turn on the radio and immediately discover PCRL(103.6), FRESH FM (95.05) and KISS FM (105.5). Good signal from PCRL for about 15 miles. 558 fades out and in comes Sunshine and Q102. Arrive at Winter Gardens at 10.15 to find a number of like minded people waiting for the big event. Somewhat worrying to find the staircase opposite signposted for the SLD conference creche, hope they got the signs right.

Eleven a.m. and we rush upstairs to the Spanish Hall, looks pretty good plenty of space, unlike previous ones by the Caroline movement. Largest stall from AUK, with others from the RNLI, BDXC and two others. In one corner, some screens have been set up behind which a series of Offshore and Irish radio station videos are being shown, including the new Charlie Wolf video, just finished. Strolled over to the AUK stand and eyed up some secondhand singles and LPs -£5 you must be joking! Other stuff goes for more reasonable prices: Flashback 67 LP, £1.99 Caroline into the '80s, £1.50.

By now the hall has filled up a bit more and after the introduction the rest of the day consists of interviews with various personalities, including the ops of Radio New York International, due on the air any minute on all bands (FM, SW, MW and LW!). A long list of well-known Radio names who 'were unable to make it' was read out, including Chris Cary, Robbie Dale and others thus the interviews start to get a bit thin later on. Met some old friends: WMR, WLR Woodstock, Radio Duck, Crusin' Solid Gold, Radio 48. A group of Caroline staff appear on stage and we hear hints that the new mast might be going up this side of Christmas and Caroline will return to all day broadcast -ing (ie Nothing we haven't heard before), perhaps an evening North Sea Gold/Rock service, still keeping that atrocious ILR North Sea format during the day, the office and tenders moved to North Africa (!!!!!!!) and other persons who shall remain nameless hinting at future activity from somewhere Offshore on 576.

Because of the high prices, most people went out for lunch and tea. I don't think they missed much. Generally the event seemed to be lacking something. The main advantage was the larger space (CM take note), especially around the stands, the Videos were good though more than one person was heard to say they thought that (probably) £20 was too much for the Charlie Wolf Video. Things dragged on until 11pm padded out by more interviews and music/old tapes from the Caroline North Roadshow. By the end they were reduced to hunting for Jack Russell from WMR (who had wisely disappeared) to find out the delays in his replies to reports.

So what did I think of it? Well firstly it was in the wrong place: Blackpool's okay for a holiday, but for a day's convention - especially if you have to go there and back in a day - it's too far. Better if it was held somewhere more central or London. Nice lot of space though, a change from the usual CM events. The main fault was that it was too long: by 5pm I was getting bored with the endless run of interviews, the videos were on their second re-run the music and the radio tapes from the roadshow - left on autopilot most of the time were getting monotonous and seven hours driving with another seven to come didn't help much. Part of the trouble I think lay with the absence of various personalities, but the repetition of things pretty well killed it.

Would I go to another? Not unless it's easier to get to. When you've seen one Offshore radio convention you've seen the lot. It would be an idea to have something a bit different, like Pete Chicago showing how the tx works or how to tune the system, rather than the inevitable batch of interviews that tend to sound the same no matter who the interviewee is. How about an evening 60s/70s disco, or live band? Altogether 4 out of 10.

Steve West

Monday June 29th: Because of the number of stations and the possibility of finding a site for our wandering tx, we stayed in Dublin until the following day. Monday was taken up with repeats of our previous year's visits to TTTR, Q102 and Sunshine: at Q we were asked to come back later as they were very busy, while at Sunshine we were shown the studios and managed a look at the UHF links, also bumping into owner Robbie Robinson. Returning to Q at 3pm we were shown around by Martin Block, programme director at the station, who by now must be quite used to groups of Anor-aks turning up on his doorstep and managed to spare a considerable amount of time to answer our questions. The whole place was like an Ants nest with people running everywhere, a complete contrast to this year when there was only one person to be seen.

Another call was to Radio Dublin, and a sight of what had been the Channel 2 studio, now awaiting reconstruction with an ex-BBC Mixer desk and Carrad decks. It was here that we also heard about an incident that had happened only a few days back: A nearby station, about half a mile away Radio Diamond had got the impression that Dublin was trying to Jam them out and take all their listeners, one of that stations staff had then gone to the Dublin studios with a shotgun to close them down and had been arrested. Diamond had then been closed down (UK Radio was never like this). Intrigued, we went over to Diamond who were located over a Snooker Hall in the Crumlin district and managed to get in to look at the set up: this was very basic with just a couple of decks, Phonic mixer and tape deck, giving a very temporary impression. Sufficient to say that they weren't there this year.

Dropped into Liberties Radio (LLCR) and a meeting with Sammy Prendergast before going up the road to the Heartbeat FM studio; we had no luck with their office who didn't want to tell us where the studios were, but eventually traced to a hairdressers at Dolphins Barn, just around the corner from LLCR. Unfortunately we were unable to gain access and they still denied that there was a studio there even when we could detect their UHF link on about 461 MHz. Rather than waste our time anymore we headed over to Baljoyle and the proposed site for the tx.

This turned out to be a semi-detached house with a 20 foot garden and the former op of Radio Valleri. There was already a tx in use: a self oscillating 807 driving three more in parallel but giving only about 20 Watts. We had all decided that there was no chance of running the tx from there as RF feedback problems were bad enough with the existing tx, let alone one twelve times more powerful. Leaving the site we drove a quarter of a mile to Sutton Park, home of Hugh Hardy and KLAS, Dublin's classical station.

We had got his address from some friends earlier on and had decided to make this the last call of the day. Once the purpose of the invasion had been given Hugh took us through the house to what appeared to be a flat roof garage block behind. Not another 'temporary set-up'? Once through the door we were quite surprised: The inside of the 'garage' had been divided into rooms, carpeted, decorated and fitted out as a very nice studio, including CD players, which seemed to be the incoming thing on radio stations.

Tuesday June 30th: It looked like we were going to have the same problem as last year: Jock Wilson, for work and personal reasons had to return home, and we had still not found a site for the tx. We left Dublin and headed north to Balbriggan where we dropped in on Pulsar 98, the station that was operating in with Community Radio Fingal. This had just moved into a unit at the local shopping centre and the girl DJ was somewhat surprised to find herself the centre of attraction. Then on to Drogheda.

There, we left the tx at Heady Eddie's, who would arrange for a site, then dropped Jock at the station to catch the train back to Larne and back home by Ferry and train. I understand that after landing at Stranraer he missed the train to Glasgow, caught the bus and finally ended up hitch-hiking back to his home in Edinburgh.

In the meantime, Adrian Cooke and myself also headed North for Zee 103, a station operating just across Carlingford Lough from Warrenpoint. Our problem now was of being able to find the stations since during one of the phone calls to various stations to enquire about a visit, Jock had managed to leave the list in the phone box!

Fortunately for us, we had marked all places with stations on another map, so it then came down to driving around looking out for masts or listening in to stations to get addresses or phone numbers. Anyway, getting back to things just before the border we turned right, up a side road and across Cooley Peninsula. Almost immediately we saw a large lattice mast with a dozen VHF beams on it: This was the Boyneside Radio FM relay for the north, beaming towards Belfast, and upon which Headie Eddie had been "Surprised" by an Army helicopter (See Four Go Mad in Ireland). We later found out that all those yellow crosses on the road that we had noticed were border marks, but the implications of this didn't worry us until an incident later in the day.

Zee 103 is located in Omeath, which although shown as a dot on the map is in fact a group of very scattered houses, and as we drove along the road it was only by chance that I happened to look up and notice the mast, looking very similar to Boyneside's, sticking out of the trees. The studios were located inside a large farmhouse and the first thing to be noticed was all the tin foil stuck up to stop RF getting in - a bit of a problem when there is a few tens of KW up just above the roof - the emergency generator and the direction of the aeriels. The latter two were explained firstly as being necessary because of the uncertain power supply and the latter because the aerial erector had made a mistake: Apparently their main target audience was supposed to be in Antrim, but the aerial contractor had pointed the aeriels at Belfast, with the peculiar result that the city could hear the station on the main lobe, with the side lobes reaching into Antrim, Scotland, and even Blackpool! Studio wise the station seemed to have just opened with that 'temporary' air about it.

Back into the car and next stop Castleblaney, via a Detour into Newry to fill up with petrol. Looking at the map the best way seemed to be through Newtownhamilton and down into Castleblaney, but on arrival at Newtown we found detour signs up and the route signposted along some country lanes. All of a sudden we lost the route (not having seen any signs for about ten miles) and thought the best thing to do was to keep heading South until we hit the N53. We spent a couple of hours following these rather scenic country lanes until about 5pm when we came upon the main road; thinking we were northwest of Castleblaney we turned left and within a few hundred yards came to a petrol station selling UK price petrol! A look at the map showed that we were in Cullaville, and that we had spent the past few hours zigzagging to and fro across the border in the vicinity of Crossmaglen! Not the best place to be in Northern Ireland. The stretch of road where the N53 crosses into the north for a couple of miles is known as "Sten Gun Alley", I later found out. We turned round and soon we were in Castleblaney.

Because of time we only visited one of two stations in the town: Big 'M', where we bumped into Ian Akers who showed us the somewhat overcrowded studio and production room and gave us his life history, leastways for the past year radiowise. Then it was on to Cavan: it was a toss up whether we'd head for Belturbet and Ernside radio first, but with evening coming on and still no place sorted out for the night we chose Cavan.

Once we'd found a B&B just outside the town, set up the recording gear and left the reel to reel on Ernside, we headed back to Cavan for something to eat and to see Cavan Community Radio. This once we'd managed to find the